George's PINK PAGES June 2000
HARVESTING HONEY

No longer do we harvest honey like "Daddy did" years ago. We have learned new techniques (hopefully), new methods have been developed bees make MORE honey QUICKER in LESS time than days gone by, because we MANAGE our bees BETTER than Daddy did. Back in World War 11 days, one colony might produce two or maybe three supers of honey in the 5 month period of May through September in Montgomery County. Now, it is fairly easy to produce three, four, or even five supers of honey and harvest it by July 4th; and if you can't, you are doing something wrong, but "that" is another story. If your bees swarmed after the nectar flow started about May 1st, you did not have enough supers on the colony soon enough, because bees just don't swarm during a good nectar flow if they have adequate super space. Assuming that you have some supers of nectar and honey on the colony, unless we have an most unusual year, the nectar flow is almost finished by June 1st, and surely finished by June 1 5th-20th. GOOD MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUE means for you to consolidate the frames in the supers, moving fully capped ones to the outside of the supers, filled but not fully capped frames moved to the center, and empty frames or partly filled frames REMOVED from the colonies so you have reduced the available space left for bees to store the ending nectar flow and maybe even force them to store some in the BROOD CHAMBER. By doing this, you will have all frames full and completely capped ready for harvesting by July 4th.

Many ask me, "George, why do you want to harvest by July 4th, it is so early? Why not wait until September or October after the goldenrod flow and its cooler?" 90% of all the honey made in central Maryland is ready for harvest by July 4th. If we do indeed get a goldenrod flow, that honey crystallizes quickly and I don't like it as a saleable honey, so I leave it for winter stores for the bees. Further, maybe "cooler" is nice for humans, but more bees are "at home" rather than out foraging, removing frames of honey free of bees is much more difficult, the pretty white comb cappings are all yellow from being walked on, the bees have broken some cappings and moved the honey below into the brood chamber in anticipation of winter, and you could not use Menthol to kill the tracheal mite in August when it should be done, the extraction of just warm honey is difficult, and you have no honey to enter in the Fairs and win prizes. Maybe it has never occurred to you that EAS is always in August, and the central Maryland County Fairs are in August and September, because most beekeeping is OVER by July 4th.

Plan your HARVESTING when the foraging bees are OUT foraging, the sun is out bright, and you don't have to use any smoke or very little. [Smoke makes bees break into cell cappings and causes leaking honey.] Brushing bees off of frames of honey with a bee brush is pretty obsolete in today's times. [Your car is fuel injected and no longer has a carburetor, you probably have a micro-wave oven at home that is used more than the big stove oven, and you probably have a computer in these CHANGING TIMES.] Although bee-blowers are best and fastest for honey harvesting, they are expensive

($300) and generally only used by commercial beekeepers. In today's: times, the use of a fume board (pad) and a "smelly chemical" is far and away the easiest, fastest, safest, no sting way to harvest honey. Brushy Mountain Bee Supply has a Fume board and pad for $7.75, and a pint of STINKING Bee-Go for $9.25. Select a day with bright sun and a time when the forager bees are OUT foraging, put a few drops of Bee-Go, Honey-Robber, or my favorite Benzaldehyde on the fume board pad, place it on the top super, and WAIT 3-5 minutes. Remove the super, NOW EMPTY OF BEES, and repeat the process on the next super. Only Mann Lake, Ltd. sells Benzaldehyde, which does NOT STINK, but has the beautiful odor of Oil of Almonds. Unless they have changed, Better Bee, Brushy Mountain, Dadant, or Kelly sells the sweet smelling Benzaldehyde because the price of a permit to sell each of these chemicals is so high and hence, they all sell the one chemical best known as Bee-Go, which is the trade name for the chemical: butyric anhydride which has the odor of skunk musk and vomit. UGH!

Lets talk about your extraction: Some beginners have mistakenly done this JUST ONE TIME outside so they did not mess up the kitchen with honey; but when the robber bees chased them inside, the neighbors called the police and Dad got badly stung bringing the supers and frames inside, the lesson was well learned. The temperature of honey to be extracted is very important, because warm honey of 900 extracts VERY EASILY, but room temperature honey at 70' is difficult to extract and can result in broken combs and not fully extracted frames. Hence have an EXTRACTION DAY party. Stack you filled supers outside, SEALED SO NO BEES CAN GET INSIDE, and let them heat up under a bright sun for 1-2 days, and bring inside just one super at a time for extraction. HONEY IS VERY HYGROSCOPIC [Sucks up moisture out of the air.], so you must keep all containers of honey covered with a lid as much as possible. After the honey is extracted strain it through a fine sieve to get the "nuts and bolts" out [bee legs, wax, wood chips, etc.]; and then, while still warm, filter the honey through some nylon or rayon material that is fine or shear like a woman's slip material or woman's panty hose. I use several layers of bridal lace material called marquisette. In the "old days", cheesecloth was used because it was cheap and nylon was expensive, but cheesecloth is made of cotton which leaves tiny fibers in the honey that encourages crystallization. USE ONLY a man made fiber like NYLON or RAYON. After filtering is completed, cover the honey to curtail hygroscopic action and let the honey sit and settle for at least 3 days, skim off the foam on the surface of the honey, and start filling containers with your honey.

To keep your wife happy, grab a pan of clean water, a wash cloth, and a dry towel and go and clean off the honey on all the door knobs, light switches, toilet handles, and drawer handles in your house, because a drop or two of honey on your hands can go a long way and is not only sticky, but attracts ants or flies. That is why I converted my horse barn into my honey house, saving my marriage of 56 years. I hope you are aware that Dr. Dyce of Cornell University in his study of making honey spread (creamed honey) found that the most ideal temperature to help honey crystallize is 57 . Hence, never try and store your honey in your cool basement or out in your garage. Store honey in the FREEZER or out in the warm sunlight, one or the other, but not in some cool place. I store 20 supers of comb honey in a freezer for a year or more for sales at shows and many cases of creamed honey are in another freezer; and the honey is always as

fresh as the day I took it from the bees. Some say they don't have a big freezer, and my answer is there is a frozen food locker in most towns that rent space by the week, month, or year. However, the best place to keep a 60 pound-bucket of honey is out in the sun or at least behind a sunny window. Or did you forget that a queen bee will not la eggs unless the brood temperature is 91-96', so our warmest Washington, DC temperature is never going to hurt honey, plus it will stop it - from- crystallizing.

Have fun and don't get sick from too much honey tasting while you are extracting.